



**FEDERAL AID
IN
FISH RESTORATION**

**SURVEY OF 1987 ANGLER OPINIONS
AND PREFERENCES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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ANGLER OPINION SURVEY 1987

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During 1987, sportsmen purchased 421,727 licenses to fish Idaho waters. Those anglers expended about 10 million days of effort. Idaho residents purchased just over 60% of all licenses sold, and over one-third of those anglers reside in Fish and Game's Region 3 (southwestern Idaho). The remaining two-thirds of the Idaho residents are equally distributed throughout the remaining five regions. Nearly 30% of the Idaho license buyers were nonresidents that spent less than ten days fishing. The nonresident anglers to Idaho came primarily from California, Washington, Utah, Oregon and Montana.

The average age of fishermen in Idaho has changed little from 1967. Anglers in the 30-39 and 40-49 age class made up almost one-half of the state's fishermen. Juvenile license buyers may have declined slightly from 1967. However, without statistical data from the 1967 survey, we cannot determine the significance, if any, of the decline. The Department should, however, continue information and education programs to introduce fishing to juveniles throughout the state. Those programs should be directed towards families that do not currently fish. Survey results indicate that family togetherness is one of the major reasons why people fish. The survey results also show that if a fishing family has children under 14 living at home, those children probably fish. The large number of female license buyers in Idaho is also indicative of the "family fishing" concept displayed by the Idaho anglers.

Sportsmen that belong to organized groups in Idaho are more vocal in letting their preferences be known than are fishermen who do not belong to organized sportsmen groups. In Idaho, less than one out of every five fishermen belongs to any sportsmen group. Based on a comparison of questions from the survey, there is a major difference between the opinions of group members and nongroup members. Those that join organized groups tend to be more oriented towards quality/trophy regulations and tend not to be bait fishermen.

Results of the survey also indicate that there is a significant difference in responses based on type of terminal gear preferred. Fly fishermen tend to favor, in greater numbers, more restrictive regulations, larger fish, protection of wild trout, and habitat protection programs. Bait anglers, on the other hand, tend to want high catch rates and less restrictive regulations. Bait fishermen support protection of wild trout and habitat protection but not in as great a percentage as fly fishermen. On most issues, those that stated a preference for lure fishing had opinions that would lie between those of fly and bait anglers.

Statewide, just over one-third of the fishermen in Idaho own a boat used for fishing. In Region 1, with a large portion of Idaho's lakes, over one-half of the fishermen own boats used for fishing.

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Over two-thirds of both residents and nonresidents felt the current limit of 6 trout to be "about right." More nonresidents than residents thought 6 fish to be "too many." Over one-half of the Idaho anglers would not want the possession limit on lakes and reservoirs increased from one daily bag to two daily bag limits if it would result in lower catch rates.

The general Idaho angler seems quite satisfied with the quality of the Idaho Fish and Game's hatchery product. About one-third of the fishermen in the survey would like to have a few trout larger than 9 inches stocked, even knowing that one 12-inch trout will displace three 9-inch trout from the hatchery. A slightly larger percent of the fishermen did not want larger fish at the expense of numbers. Over two-thirds of the survey respondents would like to have additional program emphasis on hatchery trout for lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams.

The issues of catch-and-release fishing, wild trout protection and trophy trout management appear to be the most volatile topics in the survey. Of all the topics addressed, these three issues drew the highest response rate and least number of "no opinion" responses. The vast majority of anglers fishing in Idaho feel protection and enhancement of wild trout needs additional program emphasis, and they would not want wild trout replaced with hatchery trout. They also would like to have more lakes or streams managed to provide larger than average trout. Over one-third of the survey respondents, resident and nonresident, said they would fish catch-and-release waters. However, nearly 60% of the Idaho resident fishermen said they would abandon their favorite stream if they had to release all trout caught, and over one-half would not fish a catch-and-release lake or stream for the opportunity to catch a trophy trout. If restrictions are needed to increase the size or catch rates of trout, most anglers would prefer bag restrictions. Size restrictions and tackle restrictions were the next most preferred options. Shorter season length was the least preferred option to increase size or catch rates. There was not a great deal of difference between the number of choices favoring size restrictions and tackle restrictions, indicating these two options may have been selected in tandem.

Over one-half of the survey respondents felt that fishing tournaments and contests should be regulated or prohibited. These opinions are unchanged from those expressed in 1977.

Shortly after completion of this survey, the Idaho Legislature passed legislation giving authority to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to draft rules and regulations to govern fishing contests and tournaments.

Survey results indicated that almost one-half of the fishermen in Idaho would favor managing additional lakes or ponds to provide bass greater than 15 inches in length. Over 30% of the survey respondents had "no opinion" on this and most other warmwater-related questions.

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The smallest bass acceptable to most warmwater fishermen was 12 inches in length. A 16-inch bass was the size most often considered a trophy. Fishermen did differentiate between largemouth and smallmouth bass. Both the minimum acceptable size and the trophy size of smallmouth bass was generally 2 inches shorter than that given for largemouth bass. This information would indicate general acceptance of the current bass regulations in Idaho by people fishing for largemouth bass. Smallmouth bass fishermen may tend to have a higher noncompliance rate. The Department should continue efforts to display the benefits of the current bass regulations or be prepared to have separate regulations for the two species.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has introduced walleye into three reservoirs in southern Idaho. Those waters selected to receive walleye are considered "safe," that is, they will not have the potential to impact other game fish populations outside the waters where introduced. This opinion survey indicates the Idaho fishermen generally agree with that policy. Almost 60% of the survey respondents would oppose further introductions of walleye if they might impact other game fish populations.

The majority of Idaho anglers that returned a survey questionnaire did not feel that additional emphasis needed to be directed towards warmwater fishery programs. The warmwater program category also received the highest percent of anglers in favor of less emphasis.

Just over three-fourths of Idaho fishermen prefer fishing for coldwater species. Trout species alone accounted for two-thirds of the anglers giving a preferred species. Rainbow trout are the single most popular species in Idaho. Over 20% of the fishermen said they preferred fishing for rainbow trout, and in excess of 80% said they fished for rainbow at least once during 1987. Anglers that prefer warmwater species have increased from 7% to almost 23% between 1977 and 1987. Anglers stating a preference for bass accounted for 10% of the survey respondents. Just over 30% of the fishing effort in 1987 was directed towards warm or coolwater species, up from 17% in 1977.

As a single body of water, more people fished the Snake River than any other water in the state. The Salmon River was the next most popular water. However, both the Snake and Salmon rivers flow across regional boundaries. Cascade Reservoir, in Region 3, was the most fished water within a single region. Other top-ten waters include the Clearwater River, the Boise River, Henry's Lake, the Big Wood River, Island Park Reservoir, Coeur d'Alene Lake, Pend Oreille Lake, the Payette River and Lucky Peak Reservoir. The Snake River within Region 3 would rank Number 4 if the Snake were to be broken out by regions. For the most part, the top ten waters have remained the same since 1977, with only changes in order.

Fishing on rivers and streams remains the most preferred "water type" for fishing, as it was in 1967 and again in 1977. Anglers also preferred bank or shore fishing, and bait was the preferred terminal tackle in this survey. Nonresident fishermen most preferred fly fishing. Boat angling with lures on lakes and reservoirs was most popular with warmwater fishermen.

TOM

Although more anglers preferred river or stream fishing over lakes and reservoirs, the fishery types had almost equal numbers of individuals that fished each water type at least once during 1987, and 54% of the days spent fishing was reportedly fished on flat water.

Idaho anglers have expressed overall satisfaction with trout programs on both lake and river systems. Fishing at high mountain lakes received the highest satisfaction rating of all programs. Anglers also expressed general satisfaction with the fishing for perch and sunfish. Anadromous fish, landlocked salmon, walleye and pike fisheries received a poor satisfaction mark from most anglers. It becomes readily apparent that time and dollars do not necessarily equate to high satisfaction marks from the public. High mountain lakes in Idaho receive the least management attention of all programs yet receive the highest rating for angler satisfaction. On the other hand, the anadromous fishery programs spend the most time and money yet receive some of the lowest ratings. General dissatisfaction with some of the warmwater programs may stem from the newness of those programs resistance to change. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game should increase efforts to promote and introduce anglers to new programs.

When selecting "where to fish," most Idaho fishermen place a great deal of emphasis on "aesthetic" factors such as water quality and natural beauty of the area. Social factors, such as avoidance of other recreationists and avoidance of angler crowding, were also given as important "where to fish" factors. Although important, catchability of fish, the chance to catch a trophy fish, or the chance to catch a variety of fish did not weigh as heavily as the aesthetic or social factors. Material factors such as nearness to restaurants, boat launching facilities, marinas, or travel distance appeared to be relatively unimportant.

The high value anglers place on aesthetic factors could, in part, account for the high satisfaction rating given to high mountain lake fishing. It could also partially explain the lower satisfaction rating given to warmwater fisheries which occur in lowland areas close to population centers and with lower water quality than many of the trout fisheries.

"Why" anglers fish in Idaho correlates well with "where" they choose to fish. Relaxation, to enjoy nature, solitude and family togetherness are given as important reasons why people fish. Catching fish for consumption or the opportunity to catch a trophy fish does not appear important to most fishermen.

Overall, the general opinion of Idaho fishermen, as a population, has changed little over the past 20 years. The median age has remained about the same, and the most fished waters are about the same. Preferences for river and stream fishing, bank or shore fishing and the use of bait as the preferred terminal tackle has changed little. Also, anglers are asking for program emphasis for the same programs as they did in 1967 and 1977.

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Based on the results of this survey, it seems appropriate for the Department to keep in place many of the current goals and policies. It would seem extremely important for the Department to increase efforts to maintain water quality and protect fish habitat. The Department should also continue efforts to protect and enhance wild trout populations. "Trophy trout" and "trophy bass" programs should be expanded but not at the total expense of anglers who prefer bait fishing. The Department of Fish and Game will also have to increase efforts to make the public aware of the sacrifices needed to accomplish various goals. Walleye and other exotic fish should not be introduced in Idaho where they may have negative impacts on other game fish populations. The Department should also increase efforts to direct angling activity to fisheries that can withstand, or need, added fishing pressure. Hatchery trout should be stocked in waters where returns to the creel can be maximized. Bait and lure fishermen which fish on lakes and reservoirs appear to place more emphasis on catch rates than the size of fish caught. Efforts should be made to increase catch rates with the hatchery product by stocking greater numbers of "fingerling-size" rainbow and allowing the lake system to produce the occasional trophy fish.